



## **Arlington Heights School District 25**

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT AND SUPERINTENDENT PROFILE**

**October 10, 2023**

In preparation for the search for a new Superintendent of Arlington Heights School District 25, the School Board requested that School Exec Connect consultants conduct a community engagement process that would document reflections and perceptions from district staff and community stakeholders. Representative focus groups and an online survey allowed all constituents in the district to contribute on a voluntary basis. Participation in the community engagement process was excellent. Information from the focus groups and survey was used to create a New Superintendent Profile that will guide the recruitment, screening, interviews, and selection of a new Superintendent.

Focus group participants included the School Board, district administrators and staff, building administrators, teachers and support staff from across the district, parents, students, community members, and business leaders. Two hundred (200) stakeholders took part in one of twenty-eight focus groups and/or individual interviews. All participants were asked to express their views regarding the strengths of the district, challenges facing the district, first-year priorities for the new Superintendent, and the specific characteristics, skills, and attributes to be sought in the next Superintendent.

The district also sought input from stakeholders via an online survey, open from September 11 to October 2, 2023. Seven-hundred and twenty-two people answered questions about perceived strengths and challenges the new Superintendent will face. Respondents also identified priorities for the new Superintendent to address and characteristics they associate with a successful Superintendent in District 25. A summary of the survey results can be found after the focus group report.

Due to the sampling methodology, this report should not be construed as scientifically accurate. The opinions set forth in the report may not reflect the opinion of all staff, students, and residents, but do reflect the opinions of those who participated. Judgments regarding what is included in this report are those of the consultants, based upon the frequency of statements received throughout the data gathering process.

The consultants used the information gathered in this report to develop the **New Superintendent Profile**, found on the final page of this document.

This report may be used in several ways. The profile will be helpful to the consultants as they screen and interview candidates. The Board of Education will gain an understanding of the community's view of the district and the superintendency, and can use the profile to prepare questions for the Board interviews with the candidates. The consultants also recommend the report be given to the newly appointed Superintendent for a better understanding of the issues and opportunities facing the district. The district may also choose to post the report on the Superintendent Search portion of the website to be viewed by stakeholders.

# SCHOOL EXEC CONNECT

## Focus Group Response Overview

Focus Groups were held with all constituencies including Board, parents, administrators, teachers, students, support staff and community leaders. Two hundred (200) participants in twenty-eight focus groups and/or individual interviews provided insights into the strengths and challenges facing the district, the priorities the new Superintendent should establish, and the qualities and skills the next Superintendent should possess. Below is a summary of the responses to each of the four questions asked in each Focus group.

### **The first question asked participants to identify the major strengths of Arlington Heights School District 25, and the community support for the district:**

The responses provided by various stakeholders within the district highlight several key strengths and attributes that would attract a new Superintendent.

First, there is a wealth of abilities and talents among staff, and many educators stay in the district for a long time, forming a tight-knit, family-like environment. The education provided in the district is highly regarded, with fantastic programs and resources available in a large district. The community connection is strong, with a focus on utilizing community resources and support.

Furthermore, the district values autonomy in classrooms, prioritizes student-focused decision making, and strives to meet the diverse needs of students through collaboration among district practices. The presence of multilingual programs serves as a great asset, as does the commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Additionally, the district is characterized by a supportive administration, a dedicated and effective Board of Education, and a focus on a progressive strategic plan.

The community itself has a vibrant and rich culture, with strong community engagement, invested families, and a diverse social and cultural landscape. Pride in the diversity of the community is apparent; families move to the district for its strong academic program and attention to all student needs. The district enjoys well-funded schools and a high level of parent involvement, contributing to a high-quality education. Teachers and leaders are passionate and deeply committed to their roles (with many living in the community and/or who went to District 25 schools themselves), and there is a strong sense of pride and happiness within the district.

The district is viewed as a destination for both educators and families, boasting a positive culture and a focus on addressing the mental and emotional health of students. Moreover, it is known for its collaborative spirit, ethical values, and neighborly atmosphere. The district is exceedingly well-organized, with extensive systems in place to support student needs with consistent leadership that is responsive and child-focused. Ultimately, it is a community that cares deeply about the education of its students and is dedicated to continual growth and improvement.

This comprehensive set of strengths and attributes makes the district an appealing prospect for any new Superintendent looking to make a positive impact in the field of education.

**The second prompt for the Focus Groups asked participants to identify the biggest challenges facing the district next year and beyond:**

The responses from various stakeholders within the district highlight several key challenges and barriers that a new Superintendent should be aware of before accepting the responsibility.

There are concerns related to full-day kindergarten construction plans, particularly in terms of planning and execution (a general concern is that all will go well). The district also faces challenges related to an increasing special education (SPED) population with growing needs, which requires careful resource allocation and support.

The district's diverse buildings present different challenges, with enrollment fluctuations and people moving to the district specifically for SPED services. Fiscal responsibility and effective management of all services, including addressing substitute shortages and hiring staff, are crucial issues. Pay discrepancies between employee groups and, job-related challenges across education was a theme that continues to be an area for future attention; teacher/staff morale and “buy-in” are largely influenced by the authentic care of leaders and a positive culture and climate.

The varying viewpoints and opinions across the community can be a challenge; the Board of Education and administration must seek methods to ensure all voices are heard and considered, while remaining focused on the established mission, vision, and core values of the district. Supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives is important, as well as ensuring that this work remains an integral part of the district’s identity.

The district must continue to address the increased academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs of students, and ensure the effective management of programs like full-day kindergarten. Social media must be used proactively and effectively for accurate and timely communication to all members of the school community.

Additionally, there are expectations for the Superintendent to be an instructional leader who can raise student achievement, focus on research-based best practices, and demonstrate business acumen. Addressing these challenges and barriers effectively will require a Superintendent who can navigate complex community dynamics, allocate resources wisely, support staff morale, and prioritize DEI initiatives, all while maintaining a strong focus on student achievement and continuous improvement.

**The third question asked participants to identify priorities for the next Superintendent; where the Superintendent should spend their time over the first year:**

The responses from various stakeholders within the district highlight several key areas of focus for the new Superintendent during their first year.

First, there must be a strong emphasis on being visible and present in the schools, establishing a personable and respectful demeanor, and avoiding making too many changes too quickly to respect the past. The new Superintendent must craft a careful transition plan, becoming familiar with the district’s programs, initiatives, and practices; significant time should be spent with District 25 employees, parents, students, and community leaders, closely listening to their past

experiences and hopes for the future. Demonstrating a genuine care for both staff and students, along with trust in the expertise of the existing staff, is crucial for building positive relationships.

The new Superintendent is encouraged to prioritize getting to know the district and its unique identity before making significant changes; respect the strong foundation of success, assess what works and what can be improved, and plan for incremental change rather than wholesale replacement of existing programs and practices. Ensuring school safety and focusing on student growth in reading, writing, and math through careful examination of data is essential. Maintaining and fostering a consistent district-wide culture and climate that is positive for all staff and students is a top priority, as is addressing mental health and crisis support and preparedness.

Additional areas of focus include best practices for making students feel welcome, district-wide behavior management and prevention strategies, visibility in classrooms, and soliciting feedback from staff to give them a voice in decision-making. The Superintendent should also be reflective, a good listener, and ensure follow-through on initiatives supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

Furthermore, it is crucial for the new Superintendent to understand the needs of newer teachers and support the diversification of professional development to accommodate a multi-generational workforce. Other important considerations include navigating the transition to full-day kindergarten, measuring the success of programs, being data-driven, and understanding the district's strategic plan.

In summary, the new Superintendent should focus on building positive relationships, establishing trust, and creating a safe and inclusive environment within the district. They should prioritize school safety, student growth, and a consistent district-wide culture. They must demonstrate a commitment to transparency, active listening, and addressing the diverse needs of the district's stakeholders.

**The fourth question asked participants to identify those skills, personal qualities, and experiences that are important for the next Superintendent to possess:**

The responses from various stakeholders within the district underscore several key knowledge and skill areas that the next Superintendent should possess to be successful.

The Superintendent should be characterized by authenticity, strong character values, and a commitment to equity, respecting all individuals and communities within the district. They should foster an approachable, open, and feedback-friendly environment, allowing staff and stakeholders to share their perspectives. The new leader should have the ability to balance confidence and humility, to act decisively, but to listen carefully and work collaboratively in reaching those decisions.

Effective communication skills are paramount, along with a visible, hands-on, and approachable leadership style. Having experience in PreK-8 education and an innovative mindset is essential, and the Superintendent should celebrate the unique strengths of each school and community members, while aligning with the expectations and standards of the high schools District 25

students will feed into. Maintaining balance in prioritizing various stakeholders while always putting students first is vital, along with ensuring continuity and consistency across the district.

Diplomacy and collaboration with high schools, alignment with curriculum, resources, funding, and a visionary approach to program outcomes are key competencies. Managing the political aspects of the job, understanding the economic development and city planning, and demonstrating energy, passion, and teaching experience are also critical. Supporting fine arts programs, providing levity in challenging situations, and delivering effective feedback for growth are important skills.

Moreover, a successful Superintendent should have experience in an elementary classroom, exhibit moral and ethical balance, and possess a long-term vision for the future, emphasizing innovation and teamwork over competitiveness. Understanding the changing demographics, community values, and being open to disagreement and discussion while upholding longevity and stability is crucial.

Being a servant leader, holding others accountable with clear expectations, supporting professional development, and demonstrating empathy, visibility, and self-awareness are essential traits. The Superintendent should prioritize being heard, valuing relationships, and demonstrating fairness, organization, kindness, understanding, and a commitment to equity. They should be able to connect with stakeholders, advocate for their needs, and exhibit perceptiveness and thoughtfulness in their decision-making.

In summary, the successful Superintendent should possess a combination of qualities and skills, including genuine/authentic, communicator, self-accountable, collaborator, visionary, innovative, diplomatic, and empathetic. They should prioritize equity and strive for continuous improvement while demonstrating a deep commitment to ALL students and the community. Above all else, District 25 seeks a Superintendent that possesses humor, compassion, warmth, and approachability.

Participants in the focus groups want the new Superintendent to possess a deep understanding of existing programs and practices while also inspiring the entire community with a clear and articulated vision for the future of the district. A community passionate about education and willing to support its schools, District 25 is a destination district; the strong hope is that the new Superintendent will become deeply rooted in the community and stay in that position for many years.

# SCHOOL EXEC CONNECT

## Arlington Heights School District 25 Survey Results

The District 25 community completed the survey in significant numbers, with 722 individuals responding to the questions (some in multiple categories). Two-thirds of respondents are parents, and over two-hundred District 25 employees filled out the survey.

The survey data provides information about the educational community's needs and expectations and lays out a roadmap to action that can help a new Superintendent succeed in District 25.

### 1. Survey Respondents

Parent of current/past student (past 4 years)	67%	480
Community member/Business leader	15%	109
Student	1%	5
Teacher/licensed staff	19%	138
Support Staff (aides, custodians, clerical, maintenance)	7%	48
Administrator	3%	18
Other	4%	32
<b>TOTAL (Individual respondents – some in multiple categories)</b>		<b>722</b>

### 2. Please select the three (3) items that represent the greatest strengths of District 25

	<b>ALL</b>
Dedicated and highly competent staff	49%
Teacher quality	31%
Supportive and involved parents	25%
Strong community pride in the schools	23%
High level of student achievement	20%
Student-centered schools	20%

### 3. Please select the three (3) items that represent the greatest challenges of District 25.

	<b>ALL</b>
Closing achievement gaps among student groups	28%
Understanding and supporting diversity in the district	24%
Effective Board governance	20%
Challenging and state of the art curriculum	18%
Other	18%
Strong administrators and principals	16%

**4. Please select the top three (3) goals for the school district to accomplish in the next three years.**

	<b>All</b>
Maintain programs for all student achievement levels and needs	38%
Strengthen our academic program and curriculum	35%
Focus on 21 <sup>st</sup> century curriculum (communication, collaboration, creativity, innovation, critical thinking, problem-solving, and media and technology literacy)	32%
Secure a sense of belonging for students by cultivating effective diversity, equity, and inclusion measures	28%
Maintain high levels of student achievement	24%

**5. Please select the three (3) attributes that you believe are most important for a person to be successful as the Superintendent of Arlington Heights School District 25. The Superintendent should be a person who:**

	<b>All</b>
Has a deep understanding of curriculum, instruction and how students learn	41%
Is student-centered	31%
Is a collaborative consensus builder and able to work with all constituencies and viewpoints	30%
Builds a great team and brings out the best in others	30%
Is equity-minded and a deep understanding of how to cultivate a sense of belonging for students, staff, and community members	23%





## New Superintendent Profile: Arlington Heights School District 25

*The new Superintendent should be a person who:*

- Possesses an authentic, warm, caring, and approachable demeanor; excels at fostering trust and cultivating a positive and student-centered environment.
- Wholeheartedly embraces the current customs and traditions of the District 25 school community, demonstrating a keen understanding and appreciation for the community's diverse residents and students.
- Immerses deeply in the life of District 25 schools and the school community, maintaining a substantial presence within schools, classrooms, district events, and community activities.
- Leads with both intellect and heart, leveraging a track record of accomplishment as an educator and leader to effectively influence student success and district achievements.
- Displays profound expertise in PreK-8 pedagogy, innovation, self-assuredness, and resilience, and has a strong understanding of how students learn.
- Serves as a role model for active listening, champions stakeholder involvement, and nurtures collaborative decision-making; high value placed on transparency, openly acknowledges contributions from others, and celebrates their achievements.
- Constructs cohesive teams and brings out the best in others through collaborative efforts, consensus-building, mentorship, and the articulation of targeted expectations; empowers principals, administrators, and staff to fully realize their professional potential, fostering a student-centric approach.
- Demonstrates exceptional communication skills, ensuring timely and transparent interactions with internal and external stakeholders; enhances the District 25 image through persuasive speaking, adept writing, and by demonstrating social/multimedia proficiency.
- Makes challenging decisions with the well-being of students at the forefront; conveying choices with clarity, logic, and empathy, considering input from stakeholders.
- Collaborates effectively with the Board of Education, aligning decisions with the District 25 vision and objectives transparently, and with unwavering perseverance; articulates a compelling vision for the district's short and long-term future, and can motivate others to adhere to high standards for all students and staff.
- Prioritizes the recruitment, advancement, and retention of high-quality educators and leaders; places a priority on getting to know and value staff on both a personal and professional level, while embracing diversity within the workforce.
- Possesses a comprehensive understanding of the operational dynamics of a PreK-8 school district, and proactively seeks opportunities at local, state, and national levels to secure resources and cultivate collaborative partnerships.